

**Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.**

**PhilJA Trafficking In Persons Conference**

**November 2, 2010**

**Traders Hotel**

Secretary de Lima, Chancellor Azcuna, distinguished judges, prosecutors, and our NGO partners: *magandang umaga sa inyong lahat*. I am honored to be here today with such a distinguished group of friends and allies in the fight against trafficking in persons.

You all know well the sobering reality of human trafficking. Every day, all over the Philippines, men, women, and children make the hard decision to leave their families behind in search of jobs in such cities as Cebu, Manila, Angeles, and Zamboanga, or go overseas to such countries as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

These people are simply doing what we all do: looking for ways to improve their lives, to provide for their families. But all too often their dreams are transformed into a nightmare of exploitation as they find themselves forced or coerced into bonded labor, bought and sold in prostitution, exploited in involuntary domestic servitude, or enslaved in agricultural work, on fishing boats, or in factories.

As Secretary Hillary Clinton recently said, "Let's call it what it is, a modern form of slavery."

One of the U.S. Government's top global priorities is ensuring that human traffickers are punished for their crimes. This is why I am so excited to see this group here today. You represent a powerful mix of judges, prosecutors, and NGOs who can ensure that human traffickers -- those who out of greed exploit the vulnerable -- are brought to justice.

The Philippine anti-trafficking law is a potent weapon, but effective enforcement is key to its success. The relatively low number of convictions since its promulgation relative to a) the number of cases filed, and b) the prevalence of the problem, has for too long created an enabling environment in which exploiters rarely face meaningful penalties, and victims wait years for justice.

Human trafficking is a serious crime that requires a criminal justice response; administrative penalties such as fines or reprimands – or payments to victims so they drop the case – create a culture of impunity that allows traffickers to thrive.

So I challenge all of you consider what more you can do to combat modern slavery, to consider what new techniques you can employ in your daily work. I challenge you to do more because fighting human trafficking is not a static exercise. We have to do more every year and change our tactics as traffickers change theirs. Given the tremendous experience of the speakers on this conference's agenda, I think you'll leave here with some great new ideas.

As much as we are here to discuss issues such as specific best practices of successful prosecution and case management, in the end this is all about people. Protecting victims, the strong survivors of human trafficking, requires that we act with urgency, and it is for them that I encourage you to recommit yourselves to the war against trafficking in persons.

If we stay vigilant and continue to work together, we can turn the tide in the global struggle against trafficking in persons. *Tama na! Labanan nating lahat ang trafficking!* (Enough! Let us all fight against trafficking!)

Thank you all for the courage and fortitude that you bring to this fight.